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PRICE THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

A DEAL IN DUCKS

BY

GUY L. CLEMENTS



ATCHISON, KANSAS
J. R. HELLENER & CO.

Successful Rural Plays

A Strong List From Which to Select Your Next Play

FARM FOLKS. A Rural Play in Four Acts, by ARTHUR LEWIS TUBBS. For five male and six female characters. Time of playing, two hours and a half. One simple exterior, two easy interior scenes. Costumes, modern. Flora Goodwin, a farmer's daughter, is engaged to Philip Burleigh, a young New Yorker. Philip's mother wants him to marry a society woman, and by falsehoods makes Flora believe Philip does not love her. Dave Weston, who wants Flora himself, helps the deception by intercepting a letter from Philip to Flora. She agrees to marry Dave, but on the eve of their marriage Dave confesses, Philip learns the truth, and he and Flora are reunited. It is a simple plot, but full of speeches and situations that sway an audience alternately to tears and to laughter.

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THE OLD NEW HAMPSHIRE HOME. A New England Drama in Three Acts, by FRANK DUMONT. For seven males and four females. Time, two hours and a half. Costumes, modern. A play with a strong heart interest and pathos, yet rich in humor. Easy to act and very effective. A rural drama of the "Old Homestead" and "Way Down East" type. Two exterior scenes, one interior, all easy to set. Full of strong situations and delightfully humorous passages. The kind of a play everybody understands and likes.

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A Play in Three Acts

By
GUY L. CLEMENTS



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1921

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A Deal in Ducks

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A Deal in Ducks

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JACK GILLMORE . *Editor of the "Sandburn Echo"*
ROBERT WHITE *Jack's college chum*
JOHN HARDNOCK *Capitalist and land owner*
MIKE MCCONEY *The printer's devil*
RUTH HARDNOCK *Jack's fiancée*
BETTY HART *Jack's assistant*

TIME:—Soon after the United States entered the World War.

PLACE.—Small middle-western town.

TIME OF PLAYING:—About two hours.

STORY OF THE PLAY

The play opens soon after the United States entered the World War. Jack Gillmore is a young newspaper editor in a small country town of western Nebraska. Jack is in love with Ruth Hardnock, the daughter of a retired rancher and capitalist. Mr. Hardnock objects to their marriage because Jack is not rich. Jack enlists in the army and rather than close down his paper he leaves it in charge of Robert White, who has had no experience but is full of confidence. Jack's assistants, Betty Hart and Mike McConey, agree to stay and help edit the paper. To assist Jack in his love affair the new editorial staff plot to swindle Mr. Hardnock out of a sum of money in order to win his consent to Ruth's marriage. Their plans are greatly assisted by the Government's announcement of the discovery of

potash in that vicinity. They use Jack's money to make the first payment on a lake they buy from Mr. Hardnock and soon get into difficulties through their mistakes and inability to meet their bills. Jack, becoming suspicious, returns home on a furlough and very nearly spoils their plans. They finally succeed in re-selling Mr. Hardnock his lake for fifty thousand dollars. They turn the money over to Jack and he uses it to win Mr. Hardnock's consent to his marriage. Jack then returns the money to Mr. Hardnock but holds back enough to build the house that Mr. Hardnock had promised them. Hardnock is so impressed with Bob's clever work that he hires him to take charge of his affairs. Ruth and Jack win a home; Bob a housekeeper and Betty a rug beater, all on account of a little "business ingenuity."

Act I. Office of the *Sandburn Echo*.

Act II. Same as Act I.

Act III. Same as Act II.

A Deal in Ducks

ACT I

SCENE.—*Office of a typical, small, country newspaper. Desk for JACK and desk with a typewriter for BETTY. Sale bills and calendars on the walls. Waste paper baskets, newspapers, advertisements and so forth scattered about the room to give it the appearance of a country town newspaper. BETTY is discovered at her desk busily engaged in writing copy.*

(MIKE enters at C. D. As he talks with BETTY he removes his hat and coat and hangs them on the peg from which he takes an apron. He puts on the apron and lights a short, stubby pipe.)

BETTY (*stops working and looks up*). Good-morning, Mike.

MIKE. Top of the marnin' to yez, Miss Betty.

BETTY. You are a little late to work this morning, Mike.

MIKE. Couldn't help it this marnin'. Sure and we are having lots of excitement down at our house.

BETTY. What's the matter? Are some of the children sick again?

MIKE. No, a burgular broke into our house about three o'clock this marnin'.

BETTY. A burgular! Mercy, did he get anything?

MIKE. Did he get anything? Begora, ye ought to see his eye. Sure and me wife thought it was me.

BETTY. You shouldn't stay out so late nights, Mike. I'm afraid you don't appreciate your wife as you should.

MIKE. Oh, I appreciate Maggie all right. She went to Sunday School the other Sunday and learned all about heaping on coals of fire.

BETTY. Isn't that splendid? And now I suppose she's trying it on you.

MIKE. Yes, she's trying it on me, all right. Only she's got the thing mixed up a bit and begora she's using hot water.

BETTY. Now, Mike, I know better than that. Maggie is a good wife and you will go a long way before you find another one like her.

MIKE. Sure an' you're right, Miss Betty. Maggie is the best little pal in the world. I was late this marnin' hunting me pipe. The kids had it out in the back yard blowing bubbles with it. Has Jack been down this marnin'?

BETTY. Yes. He went to the post-office for the mail. Jack is very anxious to see his mail every day now as he hopes to hear from the War Department in regard to his enlistment in the army.

MIKE. An' phwat wad become of the paper an' us, if his appleekashun shud be accepted?

BETTY. If he goes to war he intends to sell the paper and invest the money in Liberty Bonds. It will mean quite a sacrifice for Jack. He has worked hard to get this paper up to a point where it is a paying proposition and now, just as it is at the place where he could reap the benefits of his labors, he is going to leave it.

MIKE. Begora, I don't blame him a bit. If it wasn't for Maggie and the kids I'd be there meself. It's hard to stay home when the other fellows are all going.

BETTY. I feel sorry for Jack on account of the financial sacrifice he must make, but, oh, how I envy him the privilege of going out like a man and taking a man's part in this struggle for civilization. As I read and hear of the butchery and destruction in Belgium; the shooting and killing of children and harmless citizens; it makes my blood fairly boil. Oh, that I were

a man that I could do something. It seems to me like looking on at a murder or watching a bulldog killing a kitten and doing nothing. I can't understand how any man who is half a man can be content to be out of it.

(Enter JACK C. D. *Hears last of BETTY's speech.*)

JACK. That's fine, Betty. Fine. If the United States Government doesn't put you in charge of a recruiting station, it ought to, that's all. Don't you think so, Mike?

MIKE. Begora, and you're right, Jack. Sure, and I've been growing smaller and smaller, standing here feeling like I been letting the bulldog eat up the cats right before me very eyes.

BETTY. No, Mike. I do not refer to men like you. We all know that Maggie and the little Mikes need you at home. But I do believe that every man ought to either be in training or helping in some way at home. They say it takes eight men behind the lines for every man in the trenches so there should be a job for everyone.

JACK. Well, Betty, I hope soon to be one of those in the trenches. (*Takes letter from his pocket.*) I received my summons this morning and I am to report at the Court House at Munford within twenty-four hours. That means that I must start to pack my grip at once.

BETTY. But Jack! You can't possibly leave so soon. What will become of your business?

JACK. It isn't a question of can or can't. It's "Must."

BETTY. But just think of the sacrifice that it will mean.

JACK. I supposed that I would have plenty of time to dispose of my business after hearing from my application but it seems that the Government is in urgent need of men. However, there is no use to worry about what can't be helped. I should have thought of that before.

MIKE. Misther Jackson has been wantin' the paper fer some toime. Can't yez sell it to 'im?

JACK. No. I stopped in to see him on my way from the office. In some manner he has found out that I must leave at once and has withdrawn his offer of two thousand dollars for the paper. He said he was afraid the war would injure the newspaper business and that he could not afford to pay more than nine hundred dollars for it.

BETTY. Well, of all the ungrateful impudence! I must say that I like his nerve. I wish I were a man, I'd tell him something.

MIKE. Ye're not goin' to let 'im have it, be yez?

JACK. No, I will close the place up first. Jackson thinks he has me in a pinch and that I will have to sell. Well, he has another "think" coming. It's hard to keep up your patriotism sometimes, when you see the ungratefulness of a few of these unprincipled money grabbers. They seem to forget that it is their property and their homes that we are going out to fight for as well as our own. There's one redeeming feature and that is that the great mass of the American people are behind the boys and will back them up to the last ditch. What worries me most is, what will become of you who have been so faithful to me, in case I am obliged to close up the shop.

MIKE. Don't yez be worryin' about me. If the worst comes I can go like the other bhoys and Uncle Sam will take care of Maggie and the kids. I'm not much of a shot but begora, I can throw bricks in case they run out of bullets.

BETTY. Never mind us, Jack. We'll get along all right. Before this war is over we may all be fighting in one way or another.

(Enter MR. HARDNOCK and RUTH, C. D.)

RUTH (*goes to JACK and he places arm about her waist*). Jack, we just heard the news. Must you go so soon?

JACK. Yes, Ruth. I must report at Munford within

twenty-four hours. I just received the notice and was coming up to tell you of it. It is rather a surprise, as I expected that I would have plenty of time to settle up my affairs before leaving.

HARDNOCK. There, I told you so. I warned you all the time and advised against this enlistment business. There was no call for it as I could see. This is not our scrap, anyway.

BETTY. Well, it most certainly is our scrap. And anyone but a blind man could see it, unless he had certain reasons of his own for not wanting to see it. If Germany should win this war now, it would be the last of the United States of America.

HARDNOCK. Oh, fiddlesticks and fish-bones! You alarmists make me tired. We are too far away to be in any danger. Suppose they should, somehow or other, scramble over here with a few hundred thousand men. Then we would all turn out and take a shot at them.

RUTH. But we have no rifles.

HARDNOCK. We have shotguns.

JACK. Yes, and Mike here has some bricks and the girls have hat pins. That is just the danger. You may be the bravest people on earth, but if you have neither the arms nor the training while the other chaps have both, you are just like sheep ready for the slaughter.

HARDNOCK (*goes towards c. d.*). All right! All right! I wash my hands of the whole affair. Nobody can ever blame John Hardnock for shouting this nation into war.

BETTY. Well, I should say not. And no one can ever give him any credit for winning it, either.

HARDNOCK. And as for you, Jack, no one who is foolish enough to mix up in this fuss and throw away a chance like this to make money will ever have a chance to spend any of mine. And if my daughter still chooses to marry that kind of a man she can make up her mind to live on that kind of an income. Good-day!

(*Exit c. d.*)

BETTY. Of all the nerve! Nobody wants any of

your stingy old money anyway. I beg your pardon, Ruth, but your father makes me warm under the collar, sometimes.

RUTH. Oh, never mind father. He had fried fish for breakfast and they never do agree with him. Jack knows that father's objections will make no difference with me.

JACK. Thank you, Ruth, for saying so, but your father is right to a certain extent. A girl, accustomed as you have been to the luxuries of life, should be pretty sure that she has the right man before throwing away a life of ease and comfort for a life of toil and hardship with a man without money.

BETTY. Oh, shucks! I wouldn't give two cents for a girl who didn't have enough confidence in the man she was going to marry to believe that he would soon be a millionaire, at least.

JACK. I must go to the house now and break the news to mother. Would you care to walk along, Ruth? We can talk over our plans on the way.

RUTH. Certainly, Jack. I will go with you and perhaps I may be of some help to your mother in getting your things ready.

JACK. We'll be right back, Betty. Meanwhile you might as well let Mike set up a little type. It will do him good.

(Exit RUTH and JACK C. D.)

BETTY *(handing paper to MIKE)*. All right. Here's some copy, Mike. Set up this prohibition notice. It will make you forget your other troubles.

MIKE *(takes copy and starts off stage)*. First 'twas war and now 'tis prohibition. Begora, I wonder what the next great calamity'll be.

(Exits into press room.)

(BETTY sits at typewriter and writes. Enter BOB C. D. Does not notice BETTY at first. BETTY stops writing and watches BOB.)

BOB *(looks around office)*. So I have found the den

of the sly old fox at last. Who would ever have thought that that old college hero, Home Run Jack, would ever settle down in a little burg like this, and run a little dinky, once a week, newspaper. He has a nifty little place here, though, but how he ever came to squat down and live in a place like this is more than I can see. Not even a pie-throwing picture show to relieve the monotony of life. (*BETTY looks up and watches BOB.*) I've been in them before. The girls all flirt, chew gum, sing in the choir and meet the train on Sunday night. Of all the girls in the world give me anything but a small country town, gum chewing — (*Notices BETTY watching him.*) Ah, excuse me! (*Takes off hat and bows.*) How do you do? That is — It's a nice day, isn't it? (*Aside.*) Well, what do you know about that?

BETTY (*coming forward*). Good-morning. Is there something I can do for you this morning?

BOB. No—yes—that is as I was saying — (*Wipes face with handkerchief.*) It's rather warm, isn't it?

BETTY. It does seem a little suffocating. Sort of takes a person's breath.

BOB. Yes, you did take my breath for a minute. Rather unexpected, you know. Were you raised here?

BETTY. Do you wish something? If not, I am rather busy this morning.

BOB. It seems to be getting a trifle cooler.

BETTY. Perhaps, but that will not prevent somebody from getting roasted if he persists in this foolishness. If you have some business, all right. If not, I must ask you to excuse me.

BOB. Why, yes—that is—I thought I would like to buy some newspapers or something. Let me see some of the very latest styles you have in newspapers.

BETTY (*hands BOB paper*). Here's the last copy of the *Sandburn Echo*. Edited by Jack Gillmore. The very latest thing in newspapers and designed especially for the numerous fresh guys that come here.

BOB. Say, that's good. Now I know you were not raised here. (*Hands BETTY card.*) Here's one of my cards. Mr. Robert White. Retired capitalist and all around good fellow. A bachelor whose tender heart is still unscratched by the claws of matrimony. What did I understand you to say your name is?

BETTY. I hardly think you understood me to say.

BOB. I guess that's right, come to think of it. But don't you think that we could get along lots faster in our business relations if we were better acquainted? You know it's hard for me to do business with strangers, especially when they have such bright, interesting eyes.

BETTY. My eyes are neither bright nor interesting. In fact they are almost as dull and uninteresting as some of our customers.

BOB. Oh, I see. In that case I might as well be going. (*Writes note.*) I will leave a note for Jack—I mean the editor—and will call again a little later. (*Hands BETTY note.*) I wish to look around the town a little. I would like to get into the manufacturing business in this town, if possible.

BETTY (*interested*). So? May I inquire what kind of goods you wish to make?

BOB. Certainly. If I could only get a certain party for a partner I should like to make a few dates.

BETTY. If you refer to me, I must decline with thanks. I prefer the newspaper business.

BOB. Sure, that's all right. Everyone to his own liking. I bid thee farewell. I only hope you will like me more as you know me better.

(*Exit C. D.*)

BETTY. Well, of all the nerve that was ever wrapped up in one little bit of a piece of humanity, he's it. (*Glances at note.*) I wonder what can be in this note. Business, I suppose. Still he didn't talk like a business man. (*Looks at note.*) Why, Betty Hart! What in the world is the matter with you? That note can be of no possible interest to you. Still, if it's busi-

ness it may be something that I can attend to. He didn't say it was personal. I wonder if it would be right for me to read it. I have a notion to take a little peep, just for fun. Nobody ever need to know. (*Glances about room, unfolds note and reads.*) "Dear old Jack." (*Aside.*) Why, he must be a friend of Jack's. "Am off to war and just dropped in to say good-bye." (*Aside.*) That makes a difference. (*Reads.*) "I want to tell you what a sweet, dear little stenographer you have." (*Aside.*) This is getting interesting. (*Reads.*) "I lost my heart to her on sight." (*Aside.*) At least he shows good judgment. (*Reads.*) "If she should read this and will meet me this evening on that cozy little bridge in the park I will tell her all about it." (*Angrily.*) Oh, the mean, old, horrid thing! (*Tears up note.*) That note was just a trap. (*Stamps her foot.*) I hate him! I hate him! I hate him! (*Meditates.*) And yet—and yet—what wonderful eyes. (*Smiles.*)

(*Voices heard off stage. BETTY hurriedly picks up pieces of note, leaving one and taking some copy from desk exits R. D.*)

(*Enter JACK and HARDNOCK.*)

JACK. Is your answer absolutely final, Mr. Hardnock?

HARDNOCK. Absolutely. I would not be doing my duty to Ruth if I were to consent to this marriage. A girl accustomed to every luxury of life, such as Ruth has been, could never be happy on the income of a man like you. If you had money, things would be different. I will never consent to my daughter's marriage to any man who has not at least fifty thousand dollars to his credit in the bank.

(*BOB enters, listens a moment, then steps behind desk.*)

JACK. Money isn't everything in this world. I love Ruth and I believe that she loves me well enough to be happy on the income that I can supply her with.

HARDNOCK. Perhaps, for a while, but it would not last.

JACK. But it is impossible for any man, within a few years, to save fifty thousand dollars and make it honestly.

HARDNOCK. It is easy if you go about it in the right way. The big fortunes of to-day are not made by hard work. One good investment is worth a lifetime of labor. And then there are other ways. Not approved of, perhaps, by your Sunday School teacher, but at the same time they bring in the money.

JACK. I would rather be poor all my life and lie in a pauper's grave than to go about the country cheating the people out of their hard-earned savings by dishonest methods. I would rather be able to look my fellow man in the face with a clear conscience and a clean hand than to have all the gold in the world.

HARDNOCK. That is splendid sentiment but very poor judgment. Young man, don't you know that one-half the population of this globe is simply giving its money away to the other half every day by the stock and investment route? I don't exactly like that word "cheating" you used. I prefer to call it "business ingenuity." If you ever expect to make big money you absolutely must have a certain amount of shrewd, cunning, business ingenuity. I'm willing to admit that that's the way I made my money. I must leave you now, but think it over, and when you can come to me with a bank book, showing a deposit to your credit for fifty thousand dollars, I will not only consent to your marriage to my daughter but I will throw in an extra ten thousand myself for a little nest to live in. Think it over.

(Exit HARDNOCK.)

BOB (*stepping out*). Excuse me, Jack. But I got in and couldn't very well get out so I just stayed and heard the lecture on high finance.

JACK (*shakes hands*). Well, Bob! I sure am glad to see you. Where in the world did you drop from?

You are always turning up just when I am most in need of a friend. What are you doing way down here?

BOB. I have just completed a course of training at an Officers' Training Camp and am waiting for Uncle Sam to say "Come." But what's all the rumpus about? You look as though you were in trouble.

JACK. Yes, I am in trouble, Bob. I'm right up against it. I just received notice from the War Department to report for duty at once and here I am with all this business on my hands and the father of the only girl in the world refuses to consider me as a suitable son-in-law.

BOB. Do you mean to say that that crazy old fish objects to you as a son-in-law? Well, I most certainly would object to him as a father-in-law. But never mind, Jack. If the girl is really worth while, you should worry, whether he objects or not.

JACK. It will make no difference to Ruth, in the way you mean. She is the best little girl in the world, but it would not be fair for me to ask her to give up her position and wealth, at least not until I can offer her something more than I can at present. Even this little newspaper business, that I have worked so hard to make a success of, seems to be headed for the rocks.

BOB. Jack, I have an idea. You know I always was long on ideas and short on cash.

JACK. Yes, I remember. What particular wheel has started to buzzing now?

BOB. Simply this. I may not be called to the army for some time. Why not let me take charge of things here and help run the paper or at least try to sell the business for something like a fair price.

JACK. But you have never had any experience, have you?

BOB. No, of course not. But then I am chuck full of ambition, confidence and self-appreciation. I guess that ought to make it go, hadn't it? You know my reputation for tackling everything.

JACK. Yes, and of succeeding at nothing. You are a fine boy, Bobbie, but as a printer I am afraid you

will be one grand mistake. Well, there's one consolation, you certainly can't make things any worse. Try it if you wish. If Betty would stay on the job I would have more faith in your success.

BOB. Oh, sure. She'll stay all right when she finds out that I am going to be here.

(Picks up piece of note left by BETTY and looks at it.)

JACK. You seem to have found something interesting.

BOB. No, nothing but a little piece of a note somebody has torn up. It belongs to me, I guess. At least it has my name on it. I'll just keep it for future reference. *(Puts paper in pocket.)* By the way, Jack, your stenographer didn't seem very sociably inclined this morning.

JACK. No, I suppose not, if you went about getting acquainted the way you usually do. Betty is the finest little girl in the world but she has no use for the boys, especially the trifling kind.

BOB. But I'm not trifling. I'm serious. Somehow when I gaze into her eyes she seems different from the rest.

JACK. Yes, most of them are different, especially when you gaze into their eyes.

BOB. She's not engaged or anything like that, is she?

JACK. No. Her heart is still free for the man who is lucky enough to win it. However, I can give you very little encouragement along that line. Betty is all business and has no time for tomfoolery.

BOB. I should worry about Tom. Wait till I get in some of my work.

(Enter BETTY L. D. Sees men and starts to exit.)

JACK. Betty! Just a moment! *(BETTY comes forward.)* I want you to meet an old college chum of mine, Robert White. Bob, this is my assistant, Miss Hart. The best printer in the state.

BETTY *(shaking hands)*. How do you do, Mr.

White? I beg your pardon for seeming so rude this morning but I did not know you were a friend of Jack's.

BOB. I am surely delighted to know you, Miss Hart. Don't mention that little incident this morning. I had it all coming to me and then some. Yes, I claim to be one of Jack's many friends, but you must not hold that against me.

BETTY. I'm sure no friend of Jack's could be so very bad.

JACK. I'm not so sure about that, Betty. While in school Bob had the reputation of being a thief. You had better be on your guard while he is around.

BETTY. Indeed, and what does he steal?

JACK. Girls' hearts, mostly.

BETTY. Oh, I see.

BOB. Oh, come on now, Jack. That's not fair. I swear that I never flirted with a college girl in my life.

BETTY. Oh, of course not. Nor with a newspaper girl either, I suppose.

JACK. Oh, so that was the trouble, was it? You know Bob was just complaining to me about your not being very sociable this morning.

BOB. Let's talk about something else. Jack, you tell her about the new editor of the *Sandburn Echo*.

BETTY. You haven't sold out, have you, Jack?

JACK. No, not yet. I have just been thinking of letting Bob stick around here while you run the paper. We will make him think he is managing things, but that is only on condition that you will stay on the job and see that things go right.

BETTY. I'll be glad to stay, Jack, and do what I can to help. With Mike to help us I think we can get along nicely, especially if you will keep us supplied with news from the front. But where is Ruth?

JACK. I left her with mother to help pack up a few things I wish to take with me. I guess she is coming now.

(Enter RUTH with traveling case.)

RUTH. Here you are, Jack. (*Hands JACK traveling case.*) Everything all packed and ready.

JACK. Thank you, Ruth. How did mother seem when you left?

RUTH. Nobody will ever know just how your mother does feel, Jack. She is braver than all the rest and is determined to send her boy away with a smile.

JACK. Dear little mother. It's hard to leave her. She will be lonesome and you must keep her company, Ruth. I will try to make her proud of me when I return.

RUTH. We are proud of you now, Jack, and know you will do the best you can. The things you are taking seem so little. Won't you take an extra blanket or something along?

JACK. No, I would only be bothered with sending it back. Uncle Sam will see to all that when we reach camp. By the way, Ruth, I want you to meet my old friend, Bobbie. I guess you have heard me tell about him enough to know who he is.

(*RUTH and BOB shake hands.*)

BOB. I am glad to meet you, Miss Hardnock. I certainly would have known you anywhere just from Jack's wonderful descriptions of you.

RUTH. How do you do, Mr. White. I have heard a great deal about you from Jack and I am very glad to know you.

BOB. Yes, Jack and I have had some fine times together in the good old days gone by. Say, Jack, do you remember those nifty Ramsey girls?

(*JACK tries to motion for BOB to keep still. RUTH turns and sees him and JACK acts as if he is scratching his head.*)

RUTH. Why, Jack! You never told me about those girls. Mr. White, I think I will have to have a little talk with you, in private, about Jack's early career.

JACK. Oh, you mean those fat, homely Ramsey

girls. Honestly, Ruth, I had forgotten to mention them to you. Some of Bobbie's friends. By the way, Bobbie, I want to see you alone for a few minutes before I leave. And, Ruth, we haven't told you yet that Bob and Betty are going to take charge of the paper and run it for a while or try to sell for a fair price.

RUTH. Oh, I am so glad. I was afraid you would have to shut it up and lose everything. I wonder if they would take me on the reporting staff. I can get all the Aid Society news each week. How about it, Betty? Could you use me a little?

BETTY. Surely, Ruth. We will be very glad for your help. I don't know how we will make it go but we will do the very best we can.

BOB. That we will, and while Jack is over there dodging German bullets we will be over here dodging American bill collectors.

JACK. That reminds me of something I was going to mention. How are your finances? I am afraid that my salary as a soldier will hardly be sufficient to allow me to pay very big wages.

BOB. Now you just forget all about that part of it. I'm broke, as usual, but will get along, as usual. I'll go out and collect a few advertising bills and back subscriptions.

BETTY. I have a little money, Jack, and you are welcome to it, but right now it is tied up in a Liberty Bond subscription.

JACK. I thank you, Betty. But I hardly think that will be necessary. I have a little cash on hand and I will place a hundred dollars subject to check in the bank, for running expenses, until you can do a little collecting.

BOB. All right, Jack, but we will not use the money unless we find it necessary.

BETTY (*putting on her hat*). If you folks will excuse me I will go to the post-office for some postage stamps.

JACK. Certainly, Betty. I'll see you again before I leave.

BOB (*starting for door*). May I go with you, Miss Hart? I may be able to help you carry your stamps or something.

BETTY. How thoughtful of you!

(*Exit BETTY and BOB.*)

RUTH. They seem to be getting acquainted pretty fast.

JACK. Yes, leave that to Bob. Bobbie is a mighty fine fellow but I am afraid he will not pay as much attention to the newspaper as he will to the editor. But then I can't blame him. Betty is a fine girl and Bob has a great big heart and will make some girl a good husband.

RUTH. Did you talk to father again, Jack?

JACK. Yes, I had another talk with him but he is determined and absolutely refuses to give his consent to our marriage. He seems to have no other objection than that he wants you to marry a man with money.

RUTH. Why should we let that make any difference, Jack? I love father and would hate to do anything that would displease him, but at the same time we must not let him spoil both of our lives.

JACK. I am glad to hear you talk like that, Ruth. It simply proves to me what a treasure I am getting, but I cannot allow you to make this sacrifice now while I have nothing in return to offer you.

RUTH. Yes, Jack, you have. You have love and happiness to offer, and what more is there in this life that is worth having? But we can wait, Jack, and when you return from the army, no matter what happens, I will be waiting for you.

JACK. I know you will, little sweetheart, and the thought will help to make of me a better man and a better soldier, for I shall work from day to day with a determination to come home again and with a record that you will not be ashamed of.

RUTH. And while you are gone I shall be making my wedding dress. You see, I am already learning

how to do useful things. (*Unwraps package and gives JACK military sweater.*) This is my first attempt at knitting and if you laugh I will cry.

JACK (*examines sweater*). Thank you, Ruth. I appreciate it more than you can know. You are some little knitter. But there are no sleeves in it. (*Holding it up.*) Surely you don't expect me to get both arms shot off, do you?

RUTH. Oh, Jack, don't joke about it like that. Nobody knows what might happen, but my prayer is that whether wounded or not that God will bring you back to me. Inside of the sweater, where it will come right over your heart and nobody will ever know it is there, I have embroidered a little poem and when the winds sound loud and cold in the winter time or soft and lonesome at night you can read it, Jack, and know that they are bringing you a message from me.

JACK (*turns sweater wrong side out and reads*).

My prayers are on the singing winds,
That sing about at night;
That flap the canvas on the tent
And flick the candle-light.

My prayers are on the singing winds,
That sing at break of day,
That waken mighty armies up
And send the night away.

My prayers are on the singing winds,
That whistle loud and shrill,
Across the raging battle-field,
Or whisper soft and still.

My prayers are on the singing winds,
That cross the mighty sea.
This is my prayer on all the winds:
"God, bring him back to me."

JACK. Why, Ruth, you are a regular little poet as well as a seamstress and I am sure that with a prayer

like that next to my heart nothing can happen. It will be a comfort to me when things go wrong, and when I return from the army you can make our living by taking in sewing and writing poetry.

(Takes her in his arms a moment.)

(Enter BOB and BETTY.)

BOB. All aboard, Jack. The car is waiting outside. There's quite a bunch of the boys out there to see you off.

(Enter MIKE from press room.)

JACK. All right, Bob. I'll be there in a minute. *(Hands sweater to RUTH.)* Will you please put this in the suit-case, Ruth? *(Takes hat and coat, shakes hands with MIKE.)* Well, Mike, old boy, good-bye. Don't give up the ship. You have a good crew to work with and I think you will get along all right.

MIKE. Good-bye, Jack, and the luck of the Irish go wid yez. Don't yez be worryin' about us. Begora, we'll double yer shubscription list before yez get back. *(Exit RUTH, JACK, BETTY and BOB, C. D. MIKE goes to door and watches them. Outside JACK is heard to bid good-bye, answered by a crowd as auto horn sounds and car starts.)* Begora, if all Americans were like Jack this war wouldn't last two minutes. Oi'd hate to be th' Heinie phwat mates 'im whin he goes over the top.

(Exit MIKE into press room.)

(Enter RUTH, BETTY and BOB.)

BOB. Well, here we are. All alone with a newspaper. The whole force is here. Editors, reporters, devils, typesetters and all. What do we do first?

BETTY. About the first thing to do is to get some copy written, some type set and some papers printed by to-morrow night.

RUTH. Yes, the paper is supposed to come out tomorrow.

BOB. All right, that sounds easy. Ruth can get busy and do some reporting, you can write some copy and Mike can set the type.

BETTY. And what will you do?

BOB. Oh, I'll just sort of take charge of the office, wait on customers, write poetry and overlook things.

BETTY. Yes, I imagine you will overlook quite a few things. By the way, here is a letter for you from Omaha. It came with Jack's mail this morning.

(BETTY hands BOB letter. He examines envelope.)

RUTH. I'll bet it's from his city girl. Is it addressed in a lady's handwriting, Betty?

BETTY. No, it's typewritten and isn't even perfumed.

BOB. From my gun club. *(Looks at letter.)* Now I wonder what they are after?

RUTH. A good way to find out, Bob, is to read it.

(BOB opens letter.)

BETTY. It's a dun for your back dues, probably.

RUTH. Or a notice of expulsion for being such a poor shot.

BOB. Just listen to this, will you? *(Reads.)* "Dear Bob. While you are out in the wild and woolly west will you please look over the country and see if you can secure a hunting reserve with a good-sized lake upon it that can be fixed up for duck hunting for the club. Price not much of a consideration if you can get the right kind of a place. Draw on us for the amount if you find something satisfactory. Very truly yours, Frank Linn, Secretary, Wild Goose Gun Club." Well, what do you know about that? Is there any such a place around here, Betty? You don't mind my calling you "Betty," do you? You see we are going to be so busy around here running this paper and it takes such a long time to say "Miss Hart." It's just so much time wasted in extra words.

BETTY. No, I don't mind—Bob. (*He starts towards her.*) That is just during business hours. Why, yes, there are several good lakes around here where Jack says the duck hunting is good during the season.

RUTH. There is a large lake on one of my father's farms. I am sure he would be glad to sell it, as I have often heard him say that it was waste land and brought in no returns.

BOB. Ah, at last I have an idea. You know I have just sort of felt ideas floating around in the air all morning but I couldn't seem to get next to one. But when Ruth spoke about her father it set me to going. Why, say, do you know that old pill, excuse me, Ruth, for calling your father an old pill but he is one, actually tried to persuade Jack that it was perfectly O. K. if he could put something across and make a lot of money. He tried to make him believe it was all right to get the best of the other fellow when possible. He called it shrewd, cunning business ingenuity and claimed that one-half the world were giving their money away to the other half every day, and that a fellow was entitled to all he could get no matter how he got it.

BETTY. But what does he mean by this "business ingenuity"?

BOB. Well, I don't know exactly, but I might explain it something like this. When Jack and I were in school together I was usually broke and Jack was always helping me out. I couldn't attend the baseball games because I couldn't make the team and I didn't have the price of a ticket. Jack was on the team and the only member they had who could bat the ball over the fence. I was always out there by a certain little tree and during the practice before the game Jack would manage to boost one over. I would get it and they would let me in free for returning the ball. Now that's what you might call ingenuity.

RUTH. I would call it plain graft.

BOB. What was the harm? The club wouldn't

have had any of my money, anyway, because I didn't have any. And I saw the game from the bleachers instead of from the top of one of the trees outside. I've always wanted to pay Jack back for the things he did for me while in school, and if I can help him out now I'll do the best I can.

BETTY. But what has all this to do with your big idea?

BOB. Simply this. We will try a little of this ingenuity stuff on Mr. Hardnock and see how he likes it. Show him where it is wrong and if possible win his consent to the marriage of Ruth and Jack.

RUTH. That all sounds very well but how will we do it?

BOB. Well, in the first place we must organize a company. When any real crooked work is to be pulled off there is always a company to lay the blame on. I think a real estate company would be best suited for our purpose. Suppose we organize the R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company. R. will stand for Ruth, B. for Betty and Skinem for me.

RUTH. I think that is a good name for a real estate company.

BETTY. Yes, and it sounds so businesslike.

BOB. All right, then. That's settled. The R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company is now organized and ready for business. Ruth can be president, Betty secretary and I will be general manager and local representative. We must keep the personnel of the company a secret and I will act as its agent. Now my idea, just for a starter, is this. We will let the company buy a lake from Mr. Hardnock for as small a sum as possible and then sell the lake to the Wild Goose Gun Club for as large a sum as possible. Then we will let the information leak out to Mr. Hardnock that the lake was resold for a fabulous sum and watch him rave about it.

(HARDNOCK *heard speaking off stage.*)

RUTH. There comes father, now.

BOB. I'll just slip in and tell Mike what we are going to do. Perhaps he can help us. I'll come back when your father gets here and you folks can take your cue from me.

(Exit BOB to press room.)

BETTY. I'm afraid Bob will get us into deep water. I commence to feel like a thief already.

RUTH. Don't worry. I only hope we can get the best of father for once. It will do him good.

(Enter HARDNOCK C. D.)

HARDNOCK. Oh, so here you are, eh? Here I've been running my legs off all over town looking for you. I had just about decided that you had gone away with your soldier hero. Come, get your hat on and we'll be going home.

RUTH. I will not be home till evening, father. I have accepted a position as reporter for the *Sandburn Echo* and my new duties require my presence here.

HARDNOCK. You've done what? Great jumping grasshoppers, Ruth, have you lost your senses?

RUTH. No, I've just found them.

HARDNOCK. You have, eh? Well, we'll see about that. Perhaps it's just as well, though, to let you get a little taste of what will happen if you insist upon marrying your pauper sweetheart and are obliged to earn your own living.

RUTH. I shall remain here, at least for the present. As for Jack, all I ask is that you hold no grudge against him that will prevent your consenting to our marriage should he come to you again with money.

HARDNOCK. He has my promise and I will offer no objections to the marriage when he can show me a deposit to his credit of fifty thousand dollars. But you will die of old age if you wait for him. Jack is too honest to make money. He does not have that sense of shrewd, business ingenuity that I possess.

RUTH. I would rather have Jack, poor and just as

he is, than to have some heartless, scheming rascal with all the money in the world.

HARDNOCK. You may think so now, but you have never tasted the bitterness of poverty as I have. I can see nothing wrong in getting the best of the other fellow if you can. That's business. It's being done to-day and every other day. I say let the best man win. Anybody is certainly welcome to anything they can get out of me.

(Enter BOB from press room.)

BOB *(looks around then goes to BETTY's desk)*. How do you do? Is the editor in?

BETTY. I am the person in charge at present. What can I do for you?

BOB. My name is White. Bob White for long. Bob for short. A bachelor who is short but I hope not for long.

BETTY. You mean you hope you will not be short, long. Is that it?

BOB. Exactly, and since meeting you I also hope I may not be a bachelor long, either.

BETTY. Sir! How dare you, a stranger, talk to me like that?

BOB. Excuse me. I beg your pardon. I represent the R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company. *(MR. HARDNOCK becomes interested.)* We skin 'em either dead or alive. Our company has a contract with a bunch of rich ducks in the east to buy a lake in this neck of the woods for a duck hunting reserve.

BETTY. But there are no woods around here. It's all sand.

BOB. That makes no difference. Ducks don't light in trees anyway. I simply wish to insert an ad in your paper to the effect that I am in the market for a good first-class lake with water in it.

BETTY. All right. *(Hands him pad and pencil.)* Just write your ad here, please. Ten cents a line. Cash in advance. *(BOB writes.)* Do you know of any lakes for sale around here, Ruth?

RUTH. Why, yes, there are plenty of places for sale, but what's the use of paying money for a place to hunt ducks on? There are plenty of places to hunt around here without paying for it.

HARDNOCK. Ahem. Excuse me, young man, but did I understand you to say that you were in the market for a lake around here? My name is Hardnock and I usually knock 'em hard.

(BOB and HARDNOCK shake hands.)

BOB. And I represent the R. B. Skinem Company and we usually skin 'em hard. I am out here to skin somebody out of a lake.

HARDNOCK. I think I have just the place you want. It's a lovely lake just a short distance from town. Its beautiful shores are lined with mother earth and during the hunting season its tranquil surface is fairly obliterated by the great mass of ducks resting upon its smiling bosom.

BOB. You are sure there are plenty of ducks, then?

HARDNOCK. Ducks, millions of them. Why, man, it's absolutely dangerous to be standing around that lake in the evening when there is a big flight on. You are in danger of being knocked down and rolled into the lake. The churches of the town have closed their evening services during the season on account of the noise of cackling geese and ducks. They make such a noise the people can't hear the preacher. I remember one fall a few years ago when all of a sudden one night it turned very cold and froze the legs of every wild fowl that was on the lake, in the ice. Well, the next morning a few of us went down to get some fries and the whole bunch just naturally up and flew away with the lake. That's the reason why it isn't as large now as it was. It hasn't entirely filled up yet.

BOB. I think the location will be satisfactory if it is as you represent it. How much do you ask for the property?

HARDNOCK. Well, I hardly know. It depends somewhat on circumstances. For instance, how much have you got?

BOB. My resources are such, Mr. Hardnock, that they cause me no worry. However, I claim to be a shrewd business man with lots of ingenuity, so if you make a deal with me it must be at a bargain. Now what is the very lowest price that you would consider?

HARDNOCK. I always try to get the other fellow to name his figure and then I raise it a little. However, I have rather taken a liking to you and so I will make you a very low price of one thousand dollars. I have always held that lake at fifteen hundred.

BOB. You are a little high, Mr. Hardnock. You see I always try to get the other fellow to name his figure and then lower it a little. It's good business, you know. Now I figure that nine hundred dollars would be about right for the place.

HARDNOCK. Nothing doing! Not one cent less than a thousand can I take. Can't even consider it.

BOB. Very well, you know your own business. Then I must look elsewhere. (*Turns to BETTY.*) By the way, who owns that fine large lake I saw from the train as I came into town?

BETTY. Mr. J. H. Robinson. I understand that he holds that at eight hundred dollars.

BOB. The deuce he does. Say, boy, he is just the man I want to see. (*Puts on hat and starts for door.*) Never mind about printing that ad. I'll see you all later.

HARDNOCK. Just a minute, young man. (*BOB stops.*) Upon second consideration I don't know but what I might as well meet his price on that lake. It's worth more money than that, but I really don't need the place and guess I might as well let it go.

BOB. Well, a lake is a lake as far as I am concerned and if you are willing to take the seven hundred, why —

HARDNOCK. You mean the eight hundred.

BOB. No, I mean the seven hundred. Didn't I say seven hundred, girls?

RUTH. That's the way I understood it.

HARDNOCK. Well, you understood it wrong. You

don't want to buy a lake. You want somebody to give you one. I can't even consider your proposition. I will take eight hundred but not a cent less.

(*Enter MIKE.*)

MIKE (*has sheet of paper in his hand*). Miss Betty, do yez want to have this ad run another week?

BETTY. What ad is that, Mike?

MIKE. This ad of Mr. Brown's sayin' he wants to sell his lake fer six hoondred dollars.

BETTY. Oh, yes, to be sure. I had forgotten about that. Yes, Mike, run it another week.

BOB. Say, let me see that ad a minute. (*Takes paper from MIKE and looks at it.*) Why, here is a lake advertised for sale at six hundred dollars. Is it a good lake to hunt on?

MIKE. It is one of the best duck lakes around here. Are yez in th' market fer a lake, sor?

BOB. Well I should say I am. Do you know where I can get in touch with this man Brown?

MIKE. No, but there's a Misther Hardy who lives a coupla miles beyant th' town, who has a foine lake fer sale. I heard him say he'd take five hoondred and fifty dollars fer it.

BOB. He is the bird I want to see. (*Hands MIKE paper.*) Thanks. Sorry that we cannot come to terms, Mr. Hardnock, but I must do business where I can do the best. A fellow must look out for himself nowadays or somebody is apt to get the best of him.

(*Starts off.*)

HARDNOCK. Hold on, hold on. Those fellows can't underbid me like that and get away with it. We'll see who's selling lakes around here. I'll meet Harding's price. It's simply giving the thing away, but they can't put one over on me like that.

BOB. Well, I don't know but what I ought to look at this Harding lake first, but if you are willing to let yours go for five hundred dollars I guess we might as well close the deal.

HARDNOCK. Yes, for goodness' sakes, yes. Take it quick before you get any lower. The first thing I know you will be wanting me to pay you something for taking it off of my hands. Get a contract drawn and we will sign up. I believe in having things done in a businesslike way, especially when you are dealing with such a slippery eel.

BOB. All right. Thanks. I'll go right down to the lawyers and have a contract drawn up and return it here for you to sign. One hundred dollars cash down and four hundred on final settlement in say four weeks' time. So long.

(Exit BOB C. D.)

HARDNOCK. Mike, why in thunder did you come blundering in just as you did and spoil things? I was just about to land him for eight hundred dollars when you came in and spilled the beans. That little speel of yours cost me just three hundred dollars.

RUTH. Don't blame Mike, father. How could he know that you were on a deal?

HARDNOCK. No, I suppose not, but it looks mighty suspicious just the same. Oh, I got more than it is worth, anyway. The water in that lake is so impure that even the cattle won't drink it. I call that putting it over in pretty good shape. I guess I'll walk down to the office and get the mail while I am waiting for the contract.

(Exit HARDNOCK C. D.)

MIKE. Begora, Oi belave he thinks Oi did it on purpose.

BETTY. And I'm afraid you did, Mike. You are in bad now for sure.

RUTH. You were pretty clever at it just the same. I think the Skinem Real Estate Company will have to give you some of the commission.

BETTY. Do you think that we are treating your father just exactly right, Ruth?

RUTH. I don't care whether we are or not. Father

had no business talking to Jack as he did, and I would like to be one to help teach him a lesson.

(Enter BOB, very excited. Has newspaper in hand.)

BOB. Listen, folks! What do you think of this? (Reads.) "Potash discovered in Lakes of Western Nebraska." The morning papers are full of the reports. (BOB spreads paper out on desk. RUTH, BETTY and MIKE crowd around trying to read. BOB reads.) "After months of secret tests and experiments the Government announces that the waters of many of the lakes of Western Nebraska, especially around Alliance and Sandburn, contain enormous deposits of potash. The war has boosted the price of potash tremendously and ranchers wake up in the morning to find themselves millionaires. Milling companies have already leased many of the lakes. Farmers are advised to have the water on their farms analyzed before entering into contracts with strangers." (Turns pages of paper.) Everything in the paper seems to be about potash.

BETTY. That will mean a big boom for this country. Who would have thought that they would ever discover anything in these sand piles?

RUTH. What if there should be potash in father's lake?

BOB. By George, that's right. Say, where is he, anyway? If he gets wind of this he will never sign up that contract.

RUTH. He just went down-town for the mail.

BOB. We must head him off somehow. If he ever gets his mail and gets a squint at the paper it will be good-night for us.

BETTY. Mike, you hurry down the back way and beat Mr. Hardnock to the post-office if you can. Get his mail and bring it up here.

MIKE (puts on hat and hurries out C. D.). Begora, if I get pinched fer this job yez all will have to go me bail.

(Exit.)

RUTH. I will go down the front way. Perhaps I can overtake father and persuade him to come back. At least I can keep him from talking to other people.

(Exit RUTH C. D.)

BETTY. Gee, this is getting exciting. And we don't know whether there is anything to get excited about yet or not.

BOB. Possibly not, still I feel that there is a chance.

BETTY. So do I. Especially as Mr. Hardnock made a remark about the water being so polluted that the cattle don't like it. Do cattle like potash?

BOB. I don't know. I never heard of any one feeding it to them. What worries me is how are we going to get this contract signed up before the gentleman with business ingenuity gets next to what's up?

BETTY. We're regular crooks, aren't we?

BOB. This is the first time I ever took part in a genuine swindle, but I rather like it. Especially with such a peach for an accomplice.

BETTY. Never mind your pretty speeches during office hours. Better be figuring on a way to pay for this lake.

BOB. By golly! That's right. I suppose we'll have to pay for it, won't we?

BETTY. Yes, I suppose we will.

BOB. Funny, but I never thought of that. How in the dickens will we do it?

BETTY. I haven't the least idea. This is your deal, you know.

BOB. Oh, yes, I know all right and I have just exactly ninety-eight cents, a collar button and two shingle nails.

BETTY. Rather small capital to start a real estate business on, isn't it?

BOB. Yes. It's what you might call "mixed collateral." I have it.

BETTY. What, the money?

BOB. No, a scheme. I will use their letter and draw on the Gun Club for the money.

BETTY. And that will give the Gun Club a claim on the lake if it should prove to be valuable.

BOB. That's so. Well, then, we will have to use the hundred dollars that Jack left to pay the running expenses of the paper with.

BETTY. And what about the paper?

BOB. It may run us a little close but we will manage somehow.

BETTY. And how about the other four hundred dollars we are to pay in four weeks?

BOB. I don't know exactly, but there's no use to worry about that for four weeks. I guess we can raise the money somehow. Just leave things to me and don't worry.

(Enter RUTH and HARDNOCK. She has him by the arm and is urging him in.)

RUTH. Here is father, Mr. White. I was fortunate in overtaking him before he had gone very far.

HARDNOCK. What's the all-fired rush? You'd think it was a case of life and death to get this contract signed up. There I was, almost down to the post-office, but nothing would do but that I must hurry right back. Now I will have to go clear back again for the mail and here I haven't even seen a morning paper.

BETTY. Never mind, Mr. Hardnock, Mike is going to the office and I will have him bring your mail here.

HARDNOCK *(sees paper on desk)*. Ah, there's a paper now.

(HARDNOCK and BETTY reach paper at same time. RUTH screams, BETTY lets go of paper. All excited.)

BETTY. Oh, excuse me.

HARDNOCK. Molly Jones, Ruth, what's the matter?

RUTH. Why, I—I—hardly know. I guess I saw a mouse or something.

BETTY. Mouse!

(Screams and both BETTY and RUTH get on chairs.)

HARDNOCK. Well, there's no use in making such a fuss about it. *(Starts to unfold paper.)*

BOB. Keep still, folks. I see the little rascal. *(Advances towards HARDNOCK.)* Don't anybody move or you will scare it away. Let me have the paper a minute, Mr. Hardnock, and I will kill it. *(Takes paper and makes plunge as if for mouse. Upsets waste paper basket and emerges with newspaper rolled up holding each end.)* Ah, I have the little thief inside this paper. Here is where you depart this troublesome life.

(Pretends to step on paper.)

RUTH. Oh, don't kill the poor little thing. Throw it out of the window.

BOB. Although I am naturally hard hearted I cannot refuse your tender pleadings. *(Goes to window.)* There you go, you little robber. *(Throws paper out of window.)* Good-bye and good luck.

HARDNOCK. Thunderation! There goes the paper and I haven't seen a headline this morning.

BOB. Excuse me. I forgot you hadn't seen the paper. Mike will soon be here now with your mail. Meanwhile we might as well get the contract signed up. *(Takes contract from his pocket. Places it on desk.)* Here it is, all in proper form and only needing your signature to close the deal.

HARDNOCK *(sits at desk and takes pen)*. Where do I sign? On this line?

BOB. Yes, right here. Your full name, please.

HARDNOCK *(about to sign, then lays down pen and takes out spectacles)*. Guess I'll have to get out my other eyes. I can't see as well as I could once.

(As he is about to sign MIKE enters C. D. with paper and few letters which he places on desk in front of HARDNOCK.)

MIKE. Here's yer mail, Misther Hardnock. I was down to the office so I brot ut along with me.

HARDNOCK. Thanks, Mike; I was just wanting it.

(Starts to look at mail. BOB takes paper.)

BOB. If you don't mind I will look over the headlines while you are signing the contract.

HARDNOCK. Sure, help yourself. *(Picks up letter and looks at it.)* Here's a letter from the National Potash Company. I wonder what they can want with me.

(Starts to open letter.)

RUTH. Better sign the contract, father, and then take your time to look over your mail.

HARDNOCK. Yes, yes. *(Signs contract and hands it to BOB.)* There you are. A contract for the sale of the lake. One hundred dollars now and four hundred more on final settlement.

BOB. Thanks, and here's a check for the hundred. *(Hands him check.)* And here's your paper.

(Hands him newspaper.)

HARDNOCK *(glances at paper)*. What's this? *(Reads.)* "Potash discovery in lakes near Sandburn worth millions." Where's that letter? *(Hurriedly opens letter and reads.)* "Mr. John Hardnock. Dear Sir: We understand you own a lake near Sandburn. Our man is on his way to see you. Do not lease your lake until you see him. Yours truly, National Potash Company." *(HARDNOCK rubs hands, pleased.)* Ah, fine, fine. At last I am about to make a killing that is worth while.

BOB. Excuse me, Hardnock, but you mean that the R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company are about to make a killing. *(Holds up contract.)* You forget that they own the lake.

HARDNOCK. So that is your little game, is it? I see through it all now. I have been robbed. You are

all in this deal together. You are all a bunch of crooks and I'll have the whole gang arrested.

BOB. Allow me to make another correction, please. We are not crooks but we simply use a large amount of keen, shrewd business ingenuity.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. Four weeks later. Discovered, BETTY writing copy on typewriter, RUTH writing with pencil, BOB seated at desk operating typewriter. He stops writing, stares at the wall for a time, frowns, and taking the paper from the machine he wads it up and throws it on the floor. The floor is covered with balls of paper.*

RUTH. Oh, dear me. I've tried to think until my head is in a whirl. How are you getting along, Bob?

BOB. Don't ask me. I haven't a thing yet but a lot of wadded up paper balls. But I will not give up as long as the paper holds out.

(Takes out another sheet and throws it away.)

RUTH. The paper comes out to-morrow, you know.

BOB. Yes, I know. And we haven't enough copy to half fill the blamed thing in spite of the full page free advertisements we are running. Do you see that crack on the wall?

RUTH. Yes, I have been watching it for some time.

BOB. Well, that crack has busted up several good thoughts for me. Just as my brain gets to working well I find myself watching that crack and the first thing I know I am wondering how far it runs behind that desk. Then I am clear off the track again.

(Enter MIKE from press room, apron on and printer's stick in hand.)

MIKE. Have yez anny more copy ready?

BOB. Just a minute, Mike. *(Looks through pile of papers on desk.)* Don't be in such a hurry, Mike.

You make me nervous, bobbing in here every little while and calling for more copy.

MIKE. Begora th' paper comes out th' morn.

BOB. Yes, I know. I have been reminded of it several times already this morning, and besides I knew it myself. Don't worry, Mike. Just leave it to me.

MIKE. Begora, we left it to yez. That's phwat I'm a-worryin' about.

BOB (*takes paper from pile and hands it to MIKE*). There is an item. It will keep you busy for a little while. Better read it over and see how it sounds.

MIKE (*reads*). "Whit Upton's pigs broke out last week and rooted up a fine patch of garden truck." Hard luck, Whit. Begora, that's excitin' news. We ought t' git out an extry on thot.

BOB. All right, laugh at it if you want to but go ahead and set it up. And, Mike, if you finish before noon you might go to the office and bring the mail.

(*Exit MIKE to press room.*)

BETTY (*stops writing and takes paper from machine*). There, I have finished that elopement case and it will help out considerably.

(*Telephone rings.*)

BOB. There goes that blame telephone again. I wonder who has a kick coming now. You answer it, Ruth. I'm afraid it is Mrs. Brown.

RUTH. Not I. I am not over the last calling down I received for some of your mistakes. You got those headlines mixed up yourself and now you will have to get out of it the best way you can.

(*Telephone rings emphatically.*)

BOB. Yes, yes. Ring on, merry bells. I'm coming. (*Places receiver to ear.*) Hello.....yes, this is the Echo office.....Oh, yes, Mrs. Brown, how do you do? Nice day, isn't it? (*Aside.*) That's who it is, all right. (*Talks in telephone.*) What's that?.....

You say you want to talk to the manager?.....Yes—no—that is—the manager is not in just at present.No, you see he went fishing this morning..... Oh, yes, in regard to the heading on your wedding write-up.....Yes, it was the fault of our typesetter.Yes, you see he got a prohibition meeting headline mixed up with your wedding write-up. That's how he came to get "The Fight is On" at the head of your wedding write-up.....Sure, we will fire him right away.....Certainly, but don't talk like that over the telephone. It's against the law, you know. Good-day. (*Hangs up receiver.*) You just ought to hear that woman rave. I'll bet the fight is on most of the time at her ranch.

RUTH. I don't know that I blame her much. Besides it was your fault and not Mike's for getting those headlines mixed up.

BOB. No, it was Mike's fault. He got behind with his work and I was only trying to help him out.

BETTY. Yes, he got behind while waiting for us to write copy. How much have you in that pile on your desk that will do to print?

BOB. Well, I hardly know. I have just about run dry. I never knew before how hard it is to get news items in a dead town where nothing ever happens.

BETTY. Why, things are lively now compared with what they were when Jack was here.

BOB. Yes, I know. Jack could fill up half the paper lamenting on the dull times but I can't. Here is one item that I think might do. I tried out a great scheme and it works fine. I describe everything in full. In as many words as I can think up. It helps fill up a lot and besides gives the public lots more information than they usually get. Here is the item. (*Reads.*) "The large and handsome, fawn-colored, two year and one-half year old Jersey cow belonging to Frederick Ribshaw Jones, Esquire, our popular and well dressed fellow citizen——"

RUTH. Yes, Rib is a swell dresser all right.

BOB. "Citizen, can be daily seen wandering from

the far end of his pasture lot to the other far end of it."

BETTY. His! His pasture lot? The Jersey's?

BOB. No, Rib's.

BETTY. That's thrilling information. I can see the crowd now surrounding the newsboys, throwing the money at them and demanding a copy of the paper. But we'll use it, only don't read any more, please. I feel weaker than I did and I wasn't very strong before.

BOB. I'd like to see what you think of this poetry. It seems pretty good to me, but a man is never the best judge of his own poetry. (*Picks up paper.*) I haven't made up any name for it yet. (*Reads.*)

"Oh, the orphan boy stood on the hill,
The wind blew cold and very chill,
But there he saw the little rill,"

Do you notice how she swings? Somehow it doesn't sound as good as when I was writing it.

" . . . little rill,
That curved and splattered round the hill."

It's hard to get out of those Hill, chill, ill rhymes once you strike 'em.

"And the orphan boy stood there until,
The wind and all gave him a chill,
And he sickened ——"

BETTY. Oh, stop, stop. Don't read the finish or I can never stand it.

(*Enter MIKE. Has bundle of letters and papers.*)

RUTH. Oh, here is the mail. Have you a letter for me, Mike?

MIKE (*lays mail on BOB's desk. Holds one letter behind his back*). Oi'm afeard not. Sure and Oi'm a-thinkin' he has anither gurl be this time.

RUTH (*looking over mail*). I wonder what is the

matter. Jack never misses sending me at least a card. Are you sure there was no letter, Mike?

MIKE. Nary a letther, onless p'r'aps 'tis this.

(Holds up letter.)

RUTH. There, I thought so. *(Grabs for letter. MIKE jumps back.)* Let me have it, Mike. Please!

(MIKE holds it high and RUTH jumps to get it. Exit MIKE to press room.)

BOB. Hurry up and read it, Ruth, and see if Jack has any report to make on our potash proposition. *(RUTH opens and reads letter. BOB opens and reads letter.)* Here are a lot of letters. I hope some of them contain some checks. *(Telephone rings. BOB answers it.)* Sandburn Echo.....Hello.....yes.....you say our bank account is overdrawn?..... Surely that must be a mistake.....Are you sure we are overdrawn?.....All right.....I'll be down with some checks and make a deposit.....All right, good-bye. *(Hangs up receiver.)* There's no use of that bank getting so huffy about a little overdraft. I might decide to take my account over to the other bank.

BETTY. And they might be glad to get rid of it, especially as there is never any money there.

BOB *(holding up letter)*. Here's a big fat letter from the Indian Patent Medicine Company. I hope there is another check in it for more advertising. *(Opens letter and reads.)* "In regard to our advertisement of last week we wish to say that you had the thing so mixed up that it was of no value. Besides having our name upside down the ad was a slam on our medicine. Refund our money at once or we will start suit for damages." What nerve. I know that ad was all right because I fixed it myself.

BETTY. Yes, you fixed it all right. Instead of reading, "It makes you well," you had it reading, "It makes you swell."

BOB. Well, that's nothing to get peeved about. Let them start suit if they want to and see if I care. (*Opens another letter.*) Here's a letter from the State Journal Company. I wonder what they want?

BETTY. Money, most likely. We owe for last week's ready prints yet.

BOB. Yes, that's it. Here is what they say. (*Reads.*) "Gentlemen: Not having received remittance for past due account we are shipping weekly supply of ready prints C. O. D. until back accounts are paid in full."

BOB. They are not at all backward about asking for money. If they are not a little more careful we may have to buy our ready prints somewhere else. I guess you might as well send them a check, Betty.

BETTY. You forget our account is overdrawn. We have been overdrawn ever since you drew out that hundred dollars for the purchase of that lake. You said we would get along somehow.

BOB. And haven't we been getting along, somehow? It will take a check several days to get back to the bank and meanwhile we may make a raise on this potash deal.

BETTY. It seems to me you are risking a good deal on this potash proposition. Suppose the lake should prove to be of no value?

BOB. Don't worry about that. It will be all right. I tell you that lake is full of potash and the price is going up every day. Just leave it to me.

BETTY. I'll leave it to you to write that check, all right. I'm getting in deep enough now without getting into trouble for writing worthless checks.

BOB. All right, then. We won't send them any check. They don't need the money as much as we do anyway. (*Opens letter.*) Here's our last chance for a check to-day. (*Unfolds letter and shakes it to see if check falls out. Reads.*) "Gentlemen: Referring to the error in our advertisement of last week we——" (*BOB throws letter down.*) You read it, Betty. The public doesn't seem to appreciate what

I am trying to do for it. (*Gets up.*) Has Jack had a report on our sample of potash yet, Ruth? (*RUTH continues to read.*) I say, Ruth. (*She reads.*) Hey, Ruth! (*BOB talks louder each time.*)

RUTH. Oh, excuse me. Were you speaking?

BOB. No, but I was yelling. Your letter must be interesting. What does Jack have to say about our potash proposition?

RUTH. What do you think, folks? Jack has been transferred on account of his college preparation in chemistry and is doing special work for the Government relating to the production and refining of potash. Here is what he says. (*Reads.*) "In regard to the sample of water from your father's lake which you sent me we have tested it thoroughly and find that it is not ——" (*RUTH hunts through her letter for the next page.*) Now what did I do with that other page? I have it all mixed up.

BOB. For goodness' sakes, hurry up and read the rest. Why did he ever start a new page at such an interesting place? That word "not" makes me nervous.

RUTH. Oh, here it is. Right on the back of the same page. (*Reads.*) "It is not a question of plenty of potash but a question of how soon he can erect a mill and start production. The sample proves to be one of the finest we have yet tested and with the price of potash reaching the sky your father should make a million. I expect to be home in a few days on a short furlough and I may be able to give him some advice and be of some assistance."

BOB. Hurrah! See there. What did I tell you? I knew it would be all right. But say, we mustn't let Jack know that we are in on this or he would never in the world let us go through with it. Not a single word to him who the Skinem Company really is until we hand him the money and then he can do as he likes. By the way, this is the day set for final settlement.

RUTH. Yes, but have we the four hundred dollars?

BOB. No, we haven't four hundred cents. But don't worry. I'll get an extension to the contract or raise something somehow. I'm good at raising things.

BETTY. Yes, especially at raising the dickens.

(*Enter HARDNOCK C. D.*)

RUTH. Good-morning, father.

HARDNOCK. Well, Ruth, I see you are still determined about that fool idea of earning your own living.

RUTH. I have found no reason for changing my mind yet.

HARDNOCK. Whenever you get tired of this nonsense you can return home and get something fit to eat.

RUTH. I have not been so very hungry yet. In fact I think I have done pretty well in a business way so far.

HARDNOCK. In a business way. If you call letting a fortune slip through your fingers doing pretty well I don't see how you figure it. If you care no more for money than to marry a man like Jack I shall take pains to see that you are never bothered with any of mine.

RUTH. I believe you said that once before.

HARDNOCK. Yes, and I'll say it again if necessary. But I did not come here for an argument. I came here to see that thief of a White about the final settlement for the lake.

BOB. Here he is. Thanks for the compliment, old top. Have you the deed with you?

HARDNOCK (*takes deed from pocket*). I have it here. I suppose there is no way to call the deal off.

BOB. Perhaps there might be. In fact since you mention it, Mr. Hardnock, I am wondering if it would not be to the advantage of both of us for you to buy the lake back. For a consideration I think the R. B. Skinem Company which I represent might be induced to return the contract.

HARDNOCK. How much do you want?

BOB. Well, I hardly know. That depends upon

circumstances, Mr. Hardnock; for instance, how much have you got?

HARDNOCK. That has nothing to do with it. I will give you one thousand dollars to return the contract and not one cent more.

BOB. I'm sorry but we couldn't consider it. You see I always try to get the other fellow to make his price and then I raise it a little. Give us fifty thousand dollars and we will waive all rights to the property.

HARDNOCK. Fifty thousand grasshoppers! What do you think I am? Here is the deed to your dirty old lake. Now let's have the four hundred dollars.

(Holds deed in hand.)

BOB. Why, yes,—that is—to be sure, Betty, just hand Mr. Hardnock the four hundred and charge it to my account.

BETTY. Ruth handles all the finances and she has what money we have on hand. Ruth, pay your father four hundred dollars and charge it to Mr. White's account.

RUTH. It just happens that I turned the money on hand over to Bob this morning to put in the bank.

BOB. Yes, that's right. You see we always bank early in the morning, Mr. Hardnock, in order to cover our over—I mean so we will not have so much money lying around the office. I'll just write you a check.

HARDNOCK. You'll do no such thing. I sold that lake for cash and not for checks. I believe you are a fake and a fraud. I don't believe you have four hundred dollars.

BOB. You couldn't see your way clear to give us an extension to the contract, for say thirty days, could you?

HARDNOCK. No, sir. Not one day. The contract calls for settlement to-day and I will give you till six o'clock to raise the money. If it is not forthcoming by then I will call the deal off and keep your hundred dollars for my trouble. You really had me worried for a minute, Mr. White, but I feel better now. I

will go now and see what I can do to keep you from raising the money. Good-day.

(*Exit HARDNOCK C. D.*)

BOB. And the cold, bleak, wintry wind blew down the avenue. Gone but not forgotten.

BETTY. He didn't seem much inclined to extend the time any, did he?

RUTH. We can't afford to fail now, Bob. Can't you think of some way out?

BOB. I can think of lots of ways in but none out. We might rob a bank or something.

BETTY. If we fail now what will we say to Jack about his hundred dollars?

BOB. In my vast vocabulary there is no such word as fail. I'll go down town now and see what I can scare up. We have until six o'clock, you know, and lots of things can happen by then. I'll drop into the bank again and try them once more. Whistle a little and keep up your courage. I won't be gone long. Just leave it to me and don't worry.

(*Exit BOB C. D.*)

RUTH. Poor Bobbie! He is getting us all in a tangle.

BETTY. It doesn't appear to worry him any. Did you ever, in all your life, see any one so unconcerned about things? Honestly, I believe if he were to be shot at sunrise he would say "Don't worry, something will turn up, even if it is my toes."

RUTH. Has he ever really and truly proposed, Betty?

BETTY. Yes, of course. He proposes regularly every night at ten o'clock. And what worries me is that he doesn't seem more worried. You see, I told him I was thinking of entering a convent. Don't you think that ought to worry him a little?

RUTH. Then you do care for him?

BETTY. Sure I do. I made up my mind to marry

him the day he arrived. Bobbie needs someone to worry for him.

RUTH. I am glad of it, Betty. You and Bob will make a fine couple. And when Jack comes home we will have grand times together. I wonder how soon he will be home. (*Telephone rings and RUTH answers.*) Hello.....yes, this is Ruth Hardnock..... A telegram for me?.....yes, read it please.....yes, all right, thank you. (*Hangs up receiver.*) Oh, Betty! It's a telegram from Jack. He's at Junction City now and will be home on Number Five.

BETTY. The telegram must have been delayed. It's nearly train time now.

RUTH. Yes, oh, I'm so excited. Will you go with me and meet him at the train?

BETTY. Surely, if you care to have me. (*They hurriedly put on hats, powder faces and fix hair.*) But we must hurry.

RUTH. Can you see any powder? I know I look a perfect fright.

BETTY. Oh, come on. You look all right. Jack will be so glad to see you he will never notice how you look. Men never do, anyway. Hurry, or we will be too late.

(*Exit C. D.*)

MIKE (*sticks head in from press room*). More copy. (*Enters and looks around.*) May the Saints presarve us if they haven't all gone and quit. Th' Printers' Onion must have called a shtrike. Nobody on th' job and the paper comes out th' morn. (*Looks over pile of copy on BOB's desk.*) Sure, an' if Jack ever sees one of these papers he'll die of morteezykashun an' th' Germans won't have the throuble of killin' him at all, at all.

(*Enter JACK C. D. Wears soldier's uniform and carries small grip.*)

JACK. Hello, Mike! Who is that the Germans are going to kill?

MIKE. Well, fer th' love of Moike, St. Pether, St. Paul and St. Louis. (*Shakes hands.*) Where in th' world did ye drop from, Jack?

JACK. I received a short furlough rather unexpectedly and so I started for home at once. I sent Ruth a telegram from Junction City saying that I would be in on Number Five, but later received an invitation to come across country in an automobile and here I am. I suppose the girls are at the station now to meet me. Well, how is everything going?

MIKE. Why, from just medium to fairly middlin'. Bob's out now tryin' to scare up something to fill up th' paper with for th' morn. Nothin' much to write about except the potash craze and ye can't fill up a whole paper on potash.

JACK. Oh, I don't know. Few people realize what that potash discovery will mean to this country. By the way, Mike, I haven't seen a copy of the *Sandburn Echo* since I left. It seems rather strange, but not a single copy ever reached me.

MIKE. Yis, 'tis shtrange, seein' as how none was ever sent. Ye see, Bob said he thought ye would make a betther soldier if ye didn't see one. To tell th' exact truth about the matter the paper hasn't been anythin' t' brag about since ye left.

JACK. I see! Poor Bob! He must be having rather a hard time of it. (*Picks up paper and puts it in coat pocket.*) Here's one of last week's papers. I'll take it along and look it over before lunch.

MIKE. Betther have loonch first an' then look over th' paper. 'Tis li'ble t' shpoil yer appetite.

(*Enter BOB C. D. writing in note-book. He sits at desk and continues to write without seeing JACK and MIKE.*)

JACK (*slaps BOB on back*). Hello, Bob!

BOB (*jumps and nearly falls over backwards*). Holy smoke, Jack! Hello! (*Shakes hands.*) Well, this surely is a surprise. Where in the world did you spring from?

JACK. Home on furlough. We were here when you came in but you were so engrossed in your story that you did not notice us. It must be something very interesting.

BOB. Interesting! I should say it is interesting. Honestly, Jack, outside of the discovery of potash, it is the first exciting thing that has happened since you went away. Rib Jones' old cow, the one that has been wandering from one end of the pasture lot to the other end for the last ten years, has broken out and strayed away. Just think of the tragedy of it. Half the population of this town depend upon that cow for their milk and butter. Just think of the suffering and hunger that will result if she is not found. Think of the poor hungry children crying for a glass of milk. Think of all the hungry little kittens and pups that will have to go without their supper. Why, man, just think of all the—but what's the use of thinking? It's just the story we need to fill up the last half of this week's paper. (*Tears out large number of pages from notebook and gives them to MIKE.*) There, I guess that will keep you quiet for a little while. Set that up and then go to press. If we can get the paper out before they find the cow it will be a great scoop.

MIKE. Foine, sure an' yer improvin'. Begora, the old cow will make an editor out of ye yet.

(*Exit to press room.*)

JACK. I see you are getting the idea all right, Bob. But what I want to talk to you about is this potash proposition. That is the real reason I came home. I heard over at Junction City that a bunch of grafters, calling themselves the R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company, have swindled Mr. Hardnock out of his lake.

BOB. Yes, I believe there is a rumor to that effect.

JACK. Now see here, Bob, on the quiet, just between you and me, that lake is worth a million. It is absolutely the finest grade of potash that we have located. We must dig that bunch out and beat them

to it some way. Mr. Hardnock must not lose this property if there is any way to prevent it.

BOB. I'm afraid it will be pretty hard to "beat them to it" now.

JACK. Then we will beat them up, that's all. I've found out, since I've been in the army, what it means to be "hard boiled." I understand the gang is represented out here by some young scamp from the east. Well, I'm going to get hard boiled with him, all right, and when we meet I'm going to give him the licking of his life.

BOB. I wouldn't be too hard on him, Jack. He may not be such a bad fellow after all.

JACK. Bad fellow! As if robbing an old man of a million dollars is not bad enough. No, sir! I tell you, it makes me warm under the collar and I'm going to make that fellow see stars. I've developed some new upper cuts since I've been in training and I'm going to try out some of them on his nose.

BOB. Surely you will give him a chance to explain or something.

JACK. No, sir. There is nothing to explain. That deal needs no explanation. Now show him to me and I will do the rest.

BOB. But Jack, he might even be some friend of yours.

JACK. He is no friend of mine, or at least if he ever was one he is one no longer. We will ride that fellow out of town on a rail.

BOB. Are you just naturally going to jump right on him, the minute you see him, no matter who he is?

JACK. What's the matter with you? I actually believe you are trying to shield the fellow.

BOB. Oh, no! Not at all. Only don't hit him too hard on the nose. It might spoil his face.

JACK. That scamp must be some friend of yours. Very well, if you won't tell me who he is I will see Mr. Hardnock and find out from him. They say all he has so far is a contract and I intend to see that that's all he ever gets. (*Telephone rings.* BOB

reaches for it but JACK gets it first.) I will answer it, Bob. It may be Ruth calling. (*Talks.*) Hello..... yes, this is the Echo office.....The American Express Company?.....Oh, yes, what is it?.....what's that.....you say our ready prints from the State Journal Company are there C. O. D.....Well, that's funny.....All right, I'll attend to the matter right away.....Good-bye! (*Hangs up receiver.*) Say, Bob, the agent at the express office says your ready prints from the State Journal Company are there C. O. D. What's the idea?

BOB. We got into a little mix-up with their account and they got peeved because Betty failed to mail them a check exactly on time. They're an awfully particular bunch up there.

JACK. That's strange, they were always very liberal with me.

BOB. I guess they don't like our way of doing business. By the way, Jack, could you loan me four hundred dollars for a few days?

JACK. I haven't the money right now, Bob, but I think I could get it for you by the first of the month.

BOB. I would like very much to have it to-day if possible.

JACK. I am sorry, but my surplus funds are all tied up where I can't get at them. What do you want with the money?

BOB. It's a secret, Jack, and I would rather you did not ask me. But I am not going to spend it foolishly.

JACK. I know you wouldn't, Bob. (*Takes out pocketbook.*) I have fifty dollars here with me that I can let you have if it will help you out. But won't you tell me what you are going to do with it?

BOB (*takes money*). Thanks for the lift, Jack. It will help some. Yes, I will tell you. I have a little deal on in potash myself. I am on the inside and know where I can make some money.

JACK. Be careful what you do, Bob, and don't let some strangers bunco you out of it.

BOB. No danger of that. I am personally acquainted with all the fellows in this deal and it is a money-making proposition.

JACK. Have you had a report by some competent person as to the quality of the potash?

BOB. Yes, a friend of mine who is very competent and trustworthy has given a very favorable report on the proposition. Thanks again for the loan. I hope to be able to repay you in a few days.

JACK. Don't mention it, old fellow, here's wishing you luck. I think I'll walk down towards the station and meet the girls. They may be on their way back by now. I'll see you later.

(*Exit C. D.*)

BOB (*counting his money*). Fifty dollars! That's a long way from four hundred but still it's a start. Hardnock beat me to the bank and fixed it so I couldn't borrow a cent. I'll buy that bank some day and fire the whole bunch. I'm sorry Jack came home just now. He's liable to queer the whole deal. I hope he won't carry out his threat and try out some of his upper cuts on my nose. I wonder where I will get that other three hundred and fifty. Hardnock will never let the deal go through if he really thinks I have the money. By George! I have it. I'll go to the bank and get this fifty changed into forty one dollar bills, put a ten on top and run the bluff. Rather risky, but it's worth trying. (*Puts money in pocket and starts for C. D. Laughter heard outside.*) Here they come. Hardnock and all. Me for the back door.

(*Exit press room.*)

(*Enter RUTH, JACK, BETTY, HARDNOCK.*)

RUTH. Your telegram certainly was a surprise. We didn't expect you for several days.

JACK. I was rather surprised myself. We received

sudden orders to leave for an eastern camp and I was granted a furlough sooner than I expected. You may be sure I lost no time in starting for home.

BETTY. What do you think of army life by this time?

JACK. Oh, it's great if you like it. It's a little rough at first, perhaps, on a rookie, but after running errands all over camp for a while trying to borrow a piece of skirmish line or some such stunt he soon gets wise and then it isn't half bad.

BETTY. You look so strong and grand in your new uniform I could just hug you.

JACK. That will be perfectly satisfactory with me, I am sure.

RUTH. Never mind, Betty, I will attend to all the details myself. You see I have been learning some army commands since Jack left. Now just listen to this. (*To JACK.*) Attention! Extend arms. (*JACK extends his arms at the side. RUTH goes to him and puts her arms about his neck.*) Fold arms! (*JACK folds arms about her.*) Rest.

(*RUTH lays her head on JACK's shoulder.*)

HARDNOCK (*coughs*). Ahem! Ruth, I am ashamed of you. Come here!

RUTH. Oh, Jack doesn't care, father.

JACK. No, I don't care, father.

HARDNOCK. Father! (*Louder.*) Father! Don't you "father" me, young man. You seem to forget that I have forbidden this marriage.

RUTH. Oh, no, father, he hasn't forgotten it; he just ignores it.

HARDNOCK. Well, one thing sure, neither of you will ever have the chance to ignore any of my money.

JACK. Let's not discuss that just now, Mr. Hardnock. (*Goes toward HARDNOCK.*) My principal object in coming home at this time was to consult with you and see if I could assist you with your potash proposition.

HARDNOCK. I don't want to consult with anybody.

Besides, thanks to some of your very special friends, I am not even sure that I have a potash proposition to consult about.

JACK. I heard at Junction City that a bunch of grafters had swindled you out of your lake.

HARDNOCK. Swindled! (*Angrily.*) Swindled! Why, man, they simply stole it from me in broad daylight. And it wouldn't surprise me a bit to find out that you had a hand in the deal yourself.

BETTY. Oh, no, Mr. Hardnock, Jack had nothing to do with it. He didn't even know that we—that is—I mean that you had sold your lake.

HARDNOCK. Well, the deal isn't closed yet and I don't think it ever will be. All they have so far is a contract and that is all they ever will get if I can help it.

JACK. Then the deal isn't closed?

HARDNOCK. No. They have a contract calling for final settlement to-day upon payment of four hundred dollars. They have not been able to raise the money so far and I have been at the bank and fixed it so they can't borrow a cent there.

JACK. Four hundred dollars! Why, that property is worth a million. I understand that Skinem Company is represented out here by some young fellow from the east and you insinuated that some of my friends were connected with the swindle. Who is this man and who are the friends you refer to?

BETTY. Let's not talk business now. That can wait until after supper, when you men are by yourselves. Tell us some more about your army life, Jack.

HARDNOCK. No, we will talk business now and if there is anybody here who doesn't care to listen they are at liberty to leave. (*To JACK.*) And now, sir, since you pretend to be so innocent as to who this young scoundrel is, I take great pleasure in announcing that it is your slippery, good-for-nothing Bolshevik friend, Mr. White.

JACK. What, Bob? Impossible. I will never believe it.

HARDNOCK. And I might also add that your trusted assistant, Miss Hart, has become so infatuated with him that she is assisting him in his dirty work.

JACK. Betty, do you know anything about this transaction?

BETTY. Yes, I have heard a little about it.

JACK. Is this report about Bob true?

BETTY. If you mean the report that Bob represents the R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company I will say "yes." But there was no swindle that I know of. Their transaction with Mr. Hardnock was a simple out-and-out business proposition. He named his price and Bob paid it. Isn't that all right?

JACK. It would be right, perhaps, under certain conditions, but it is not right when he knew that the property he was buying was worth many times what he was paying for it.

BETTY. It looks to me like a very shrewd business transaction.

JACK. And so you defend him in it. I suppose you also expect a share of the booty. Is that the idea?

RUTH. Jack! You have no right to talk like that to Betty. Perhaps Bob did not know the value of the lake at the time he bought it.

JACK. No one would come way out here and buy a lot of dirty water unless they had something in mind. Besides if he did not know the value of the property before he bought it and wants to be on the square, why doesn't he make it right with Mr. Hardnock and return the contract?

HARDNOCK. Yes, that's the idea. Why doesn't he return the contract?

(Telephone rings. JACK answers.)

JACK. Hello.....this is the *Sandburn Echo*..... Oh, yes, Mr. Stanton, what is it?.....You say our bank account is overdrawn?.....That's strange..... I see.....by the way, who signed that hundred dollar check you mentioned?.....I see.....all right, I will cover it right away.....Good-bye. *(Hangs up)*

receiver.) Mr. Stanton says that our account is overdrawn at the bank. It seems that Bob has been making good use of his time. He checked out that hundred dollars I left to pay current expenses with before I was hardly out of town. By the way, Betty, did you get that error with the State Journal Company corrected?

BETTY. I didn't know there was an error.

JACK. I didn't suppose you did. The ready prints are at the express office now. Came C. O. D. Bob said it was because you had made an error in their account. That's the second lie I have caught him in since I came home and still you claim he is on the square.

RUTH. Jack, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to lose faith in your best friends the way you have, without something more tangible than the complaints of a man who has received the worst end of a bargain. Why don't you see Bob and ask him for an explanation?

HARDNOCK. There is nothing to explain. Didn't they swipe his money? Didn't they run his paper in debt? Isn't their account overdrawn at the bank and are not their supplies coming in C. O. D.; to say nothing of trying to rob me of a million dollars? What better evidence do you want than facts? You can't explain facts.

JACK. I want to hear no more about it. Bob has been a great disappointment to me, and it hurts me more to think that Betty should defend him in it. As for my money, I shall drop the matter and charge it up to profit and loss, but I can never allow them to get away with Mr. Hardnock's property, if I can prevent it. You say final settlement is to be made to-day?

HARDNOCK. Yes, but I don't think that he can raise the money. Still I am not very comfortable about it. He is such a shrewd slicker that you can never tell what he will do next.

JACK. He is after the money all right. I loaned him fifty dollars of it myself.

HARDNOCK. The dickens you did. What in thunder did you do that for?

JACK. I had no reason to suspect anything wrong. Have you tried to buy him off?

HARDNOCK. Yes, and he will surrender the contract for the small sum of fifty thousand dollars.

JACK. Fifty thousand! He doesn't want much, does he?

HARDNOCK. Simply a small compensation to reimburse him somewhat for his trouble and loss of time.

JACK. At the same time the property is worth the money and if you see that the deal is going through you can't afford to lose it for a hundred thousand.

BETTY. Oh, I think fifty thousand will be plenty, thank you.

JACK. By the way, Mr. Hardnock, how did a shrewd, cunning business man like you ever come to let a greenhorn like Bob put a deal like that over on you?

HARDNOCK. Ahem—that is—well, you see, how was I to know the darn lake was full of potash?

BETTY. No, he was trying to be on the square by skinning Bob out of about five hundred dollars of good hard-earned money, by selling him a lake for several times what he thought it was worth.

(Enter BOB C. D.)

BOB (*greeting them heartily*). Hello, everybody! Fine day if it don't rain. (*Nobody answers and he looks around inquiringly.* BETTY busily turns the pages of a ledger. RUTH reads a paper. JACK turns his back and HARDNOCK gazes at the ceiling with his nose in the air.) Why so glum, everybody? Who's dead? (*Nobody answers.*) Is that so? I hadn't heard about it. When is the funeral? (*Nobody answers.*) You don't say so. (BOB goes to HARDNOCK and tries to see what he is looking at.) What's the matter, old boy? Do you see an air ship or has your gout settled in your neck? (*No answer.*) Don't everybody talk at once like that; it makes me nervous. (BOB

goes to BETTY.) You seem to be very busy to-day, Betty.

BETTY. Don't disturb me, Mr. White. (*Sarcastically.*) I am looking for that error with the State Journal you were telling Jack about.

BOB (*whistles*). Oh, I see! How did he come to tell you about that?

JACK (*turning to BOB*). Bob, you don't know how surprised and grieved I am to find that you, who I would have trusted with my very last penny, have turned against me and pulled off a deal like this.

BOB. Oh, that's all right, Jack. You don't understand, that's all. And I can't explain very well right now, either. But it's all right. Just leave everything to me and don't worry.

HARDNOCK. Leave everything to you! Young man, it seems to me that you have already taken most of it.

BOB. Yes, and I'm going to take fifty thousand more in a few minutes. And that brings me to the point. I am ready now to make final settlement on that contract. If you want the property back, now is the time to get it. If not, I have the money ready and we will close the deal at once.

HARDNOCK. You can't run a bluff like that on me. (*Takes paper from coat pocket.*) Here's your deed. Now let's see the money.

BOB. Very well, just as you say. I was simply giving you one more chance, that's all. (*Takes roll of bills from his pocket consisting of thirty-nine one dollar bills, with a ten dollar bill on top.*) There you are. Just take a squint at that. Isn't that a sight for sore eyes? Notice that little ten spot there. (*Flips bills with finger and thumb.*) And there are exactly thirty-nine more of Uncle Sam's due bills of the same size underneath. You thought you had it fixed so I couldn't raise the money, didn't you? Well, it was rather hard at first but Jack, here, started the subscription with fifty dollars and the rest was easy.

JACK. Bob, can't I persuade you to abandon this scheme to rob Mr. Hardnock? You can't afford to

sell your reputation and your character for twice the amount you are asking. Consider what it will mean before it is too late.

BOB. No, Jack, I have gone too far to stop now. Besides the rest of the company might sue me for damages. But it's all right. You don't know half what's been going on while you were away.

JACK. I seem to be finding out pretty fast.

HARDNOCK. I don't believe he has got the money. (*Holds hand out for money.*) Here, let me count it.

BOB. All right, but let's do the thing in a business-like manner. (*BOB steps to print room entrance and calls MIKE.*) Oh, Mike!

MIKE (*off stage*). Yis, sor!

BOB. Come here a moment, will you? (*Enter MIKE from print room.*) Just count those bills. (*BOB hands him the money.*) I am going to hand them to Mr. Hardnock and I want you to see that he doesn't slip out some on me. Do you find them correct?

MIKE. Yis, sor, begora they're all there.

(*Hands money to BOB.*)

BOB (*to MIKE*). Very well, now please notice that they are all United States Gold Certificates and are legal tender for all obligations anywhere in the United States. I owe this money to Mr. Hardnock in settlement of a certain contract. If he accepts this money when I offer it to him I want you for a witness, as that will close the deal and the property is mine. If he refuses to take it, then I will have made him a legal tender and the contract will be fulfilled the same as if he had accepted it. Do you understand?

MIKE. Yis, sor. If he takes it you get it and if he don't take it you get it anyway. Begora, he had better take it.

HARDNOCK. Hold on a minute, gosh darn it, you're getting too technical. I'll give you twenty-five thousand to let me off.

BOB. I am very sorry, but I can't consider any-

thing less than my first offer. Give me a check for fifty thousand and we will call it square.

HARDNOCK. Not by a long shot. You can't rob me like that. What do you say, Jack, shall I offer him forty thousand?

JACK. I hate to see you do it, Mr. Hardnock, but if the sample I tested for them is a fair specimen you can't afford to let it go for twice that amount.

HARDNOCK. Well then, darn it all, I'll give you forty thousand but not one cent more.

BOB. Very well, then the deal is off and here is your money. (*Starts to hand money to HARDNOCK.*)

HARDNOCK. Hold on a minute; don't get so bloomin' fast. I'll give you your price but it's a plain robbery, that's what it is. Give me a check book.

BOB. Certainly. (*Takes check from pocket.*) Here is one already made out. Just sign on the dotted line, please.

HARDNOCK (*signs check*). It seems to me you were all-fired sure you were going to make a bargain.

BOB. Yes, I thought you would come across, all right.

HARDNOCK. Well, there's your check. Now give me the contract and then get out of my sight.

(*Hands BOB check.*)

BOB. Thanks fifty thousand times, Mr. Hardnock. (*Takes contract from pocket.*) And now before turning over this contract I wish you would just call up the bank and tell Mr. Stanton that you have given me this check and that it is all O. K.

HARDNOCK. That is not necessary. He knows my signature.

BOB. Perhaps it is not necessary, but I am getting awfully darn suspicious lately. (*Calls bank on the telephone.*) Give me the Sandburn Bank, please. . . . Hello, is this the bank? . . . Mr. Stanton talking? . . . Hold the 'phone, please, here is a party that wishes to speak with you. (*To HARDNOCK.*) Here you are, Mr. Hardnock. He is on the line.

(*Hands 'phone to HARDNOCK.*)

HARDNOCK (*talks in 'phone*). Hello.....Stanton?.....This is John Hardnock,.....yes.....I have just given Mr. Robert White a check for fifty thousand dollars.....Yes, the check is all right and you will please handle it for him.....All right, good-bye. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

BOB. Thank you, and here is your contract. (*Hands him paper.*) I wish you success in your undertaking, but it is a pretty high price to pay for a lake.

HARDNOCK. Now get out of my sight, you thief, you robber, you grafter.

BOB. Why say, you old fox, if you weren't the father of the sweetheart of a special friend of mine I'd—— That's not robbery according to your standards. That's just a sample of your brand of shrewd, cunning business ingenuity. I take great pleasure in leaving you at this time. Betty, do you care to walk to the bank with me to cash this check?

BETTY. Certainly, Bob. Perhaps you will buy me a diamond or something.

BOB. By the way, Jack, there is that fifty you loaned me. (*Hands JACK the roll of bills.*) I don't need it any longer. Thanks. I had it changed into one dollar bills just for looks. (*Starts for door. Turns and speaks to HARDNOCK.*) By the way, Mr. Hardnock, I wouldn't bother about building a mill on that property. It will hardly pay you. You see I only had a few loads of potash dumped in along the shore in order to get a good test. So long, everybody.

(*Exit BOB and BETTY, c. d.*)

HARDNOCK. Buncoed, by gosh!

JACK. One dollar bills and he only had fifty dollars all the time.

HARDNOCK. Thunder! Mike, confound you, I thought you counted those bills.

MIKE. Sure and I did. I said they were all there, didn't I? And begora, they were all the same size, too.

JACK. You have the contract in your possession. Telephone the bank and stop payment on the check.

RUTH (*grabbing telephone*). That would not be fair. You must not do it.

JACK. Fair! Have they been fair? Quick, Mr. Hardnock, the telephone.

RUTH (*as HARDNOCK starts for 'phone*). No, I say. It is not right.

HARDNOCK. Ruth, I am surprised at you. Give me that telephone at once. (*Takes telephone from RUTH.*) Hello, hello central, give me the Sandburn Bank. yes, hurry. Hello, is this Mr. Stanton? (*MIKE cuts the wires leading to the telephone with a big pair of printer's shears.*) This is John Hardnock. I want you to stop payment on that. hello! (*Shakes receiver hook.*) Hello. central, hello central, something's wrong. We're cut off.

MIKE. Begora, me shears shlipped and cut the wire.

JACK. Mike, what do you mean by cutting those wires?

MIKE. Begora, I'm a member of the gang, meself.

HARDNOCK. Well, you can't come one over me like that. I'll go to the bank myself. (*He rushes to the door c. d. and shakes it furiously.*) Confound it, they have locked us in. I'll try the back door.

(*He rushes out of the door leading to press room. In his hurry he upsets a chair and pushes MIKE out of his way against another chair over which MIKE falls.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*Same as Act I. Discovered JACK and RUTH. JACK sits at his desk, thinking and tapping the desk with his fingers. A deep frown is on his face and he appears very angry. RUTH sits on top of the other desk reading a newspaper which she holds upside down. From time to time she glances over the paper, smiling at JACK, and quickly ducks her head as he moves.*

RUTH. Jack! (No answer.) Oh, Jack! Are you still mad?

JACK (*angrily*). Ruth, what's the matter with everybody around here? Has the whole bunch gone crazy?

RUTH. Well, yes, you might say so, in a way. You see Bob's crazy about Betty and she's simply wild about him. And then, of course, I'm daffy about you, Mike's raving all the time for more copy and even Dad is mad because he bought a gold brick.

JACK. It seems to me that your actions call for some kind of an explanation.

RUTH. Explaining is such a hard matter. I just hate to explain things, and besides I promised Bob that I would let him attend to that himself.

JACK. Bob and I are through as far as I am concerned. He has turned traitor to me and I can't see why you uphold him in his actions. I feel sorry for your father and I hate to think that it was one of my friends who swindled him.

RUTH. I don't pity him in the least. He brought it upon himself and he deserves just exactly what he got. Hasn't he always preached business shrewdness in place of honesty? Hasn't he always bragged about how he could put it over on somebody? And didn't

he even advise you to do a little crooked work yourself in order to make money? He has just swallowed a dose of his own medicine and he doesn't like it very well, either.

JACK. I still have hopes that he will get to the bank in time to stop the check.

RUTH. No danger of that. Believe me, Bob will waste no time in getting that check cashed. He has use for the money.

(Enter HARDNOCK. He is out of breath, has a black eye and his clothing is in a disheveled condition.)

HARDNOCK *(limping and holding his head)*. Oh, my eye! Oh, my nose!

RUTH. Father! *(Goes to him.)* What is the matter?

JACK. Are you hurt?

HARDNOCK. Am I hurt? No, young man. I've just been making up for a masquerade ball.

RUTH. What happened, father?

HARDNOCK. I was in such a confounded hurry to get to the bank that I got all tangled up with a lady, a dog and a baby carriage. We all went sprawling on the sidewalk together with the dog on the bottom and me next to the dog.

RUTH. I hope it is nothing serious.

HARDNOCK. Oh, no! Nothing serious. Just a few hundred minor injuries, to say nothing of a few broken ribs and noses.

RUTH. Not noses, father. Just nose.

JACK. Did you reach the bank in time to stop the check?

HARDNOCK. No, confound it. By the time I got untangled from that mass of squirming dogs and women, the villains were just coming out of the door and they actually had the nerve to stand there and laugh at me.

RUTH. You do look rather funny, father.

HARDNOCK. And you side in with them. Here I am, half killed and swindled out of my money until

I haven't enough left to pay the doctor's bill and still you stand there and laugh.

RUTH. It's too bad, father. I really and truly feel sorry for you. Perhaps you can borrow some money from Bob.

HARDNOCK. Bob! Never mention that name to me again, I tell you. I never want to hear of him again.

(*Enter BOB and BETTY.*)

BOB. Hello, Mr. Harnock, were you asking for me?

HARDNOCK. No, I wasn't asking for you. I thought I told you to get out and stay out.

BOB. Yes, I know, but I came in to ask your pardon. I really owe you an apology, Mr. Hardnock, for laughing at you the way I did and I am very, very sorry, but you did look so funny and when that dog began to —— (*BOB bursts out laughing.*) Ha-ha-ha—Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha —— When that dog began to wig —— Ha-ha-ha-ha—Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha ——

HARDNOCK (*picks up chair and threatens BOB*). See here, young man, you may be able to beat me in a bargain but you can't stand there and laugh at me like that.

BOB. Certainly not, Mr. Hardnock. I am ashamed of myself, and I'll try and not do so again. Just put that chair down and sit in it. You'll look more comfortable and I'll feel more comfortable. You see I really came here to see Jack. (*Turns to JACK.*) Jack, I am sorry we had to make you lose faith in the whole bunch around here and in order to win back your good will the R. B. Skinem Real Estate Company presents you with this bank book. (*Takes small book from his pocket and gives it to JACK.*) It contains a small deposit, subject to your check, which we hope you will accept and use it as you may see fit.

JACK (*looking at book*). A bank book. I don't understand. (*Glances at deposit entry.*) Fifty thousand dollars in my name. What does this mean?

RUTH. It means that you have been misjudging

your best friends and that they have really been working all this while for our interests.

JACK. For our interests?

RUTH (*pulls at button on JACK's coat*). Yes, don't you remember father promised that we could get married when you had fifty thousand dollars in the bank?

JACK. Yes. I believe he did make that promise.

RUTH. Well, now you've got it and you are not going back on your bargain, are you?

JACK. Well, I should say not. (*Gives RUTH a hug and then goes and shakes BOB's hand.*) Bob, old boy, forgive me. I almost doubted you for a minute, but you must admit I had reason.

BOB. That's all right, Jack. I'll admit it did look a little suspicious.

JACK. And what do you say about it, Mr. Hardnock?

HARDNOCK. It's all right. It's all right. I saw through it all the time, only I just didn't let on, that's all. As for you and Ruth, I intended that you should get married all the time. In fact I would much prefer that she did not marry a man who had fifty thousand dollars. It might spoil her.

JACK. I see, especially when that fifty thousand is your money. Well, under those conditions I'll just hand you back a check for forty thousand dollars in order to overcome that objection.

HARDNOCK. Thanks. I shall feel easier now over her future that I know she will not be spoiled with too much money right at first. (*Coughs.*) Ahem! In regard to the other ten thousand?

JACK. I think I shall keep that just for the present and build that little nest you promised us when we had the fifty raised. We will build a cozy little house with a big old-fashioned room in it for you when you retire.

HARDNOCK. And I am going to retire right now if I can get that young rogue there (*indicating BOB*) to take over the management of my affairs.

BOB. If you can get me? You've got me! What's the salary?

HARDNOCK. Salary left to you, my boy. Anybody who is able to sell John Hardnock a bowl of dirty water for fifty thousand dollars the way you did can name his own salary. You are just slick enough to suit me.

BOB. All right, it's a bargain, but Jack will have to find a new assistant. Betty has just promised to stop pounding the typewriter and take a new job pounding beefsteak for me.

BETTY. And Bob has promised to stop beating people and take a new job beating rugs.

RUTH. Isn't that fine? And we'll build a house, a great big house. One side will be for Jack and me; the other side will be for Bob and Betty, and we will put father's room in the middle to keep us from quarreling.

BETTY. And in the evening we'll sit on the porch of our house by the side of the road and watch the cows and the pigs go by.

(Enter MIKE.)

JACK. And here comes Mike. Mike, is there time to get a couple of wedding announcements in this week's paper?

MIKE. No, sor, yer too late. The forms are all made up and we're ready to go.

BOB. All right, Mike. We'll soon be with you. And now if the good people will excuse us we will go to press.

(RUTH and JACK and BOB and BETTY embrace.)

CURTAIN

Successful Plays for All Girls

In Selecting Your Next Play Do Not Overlook This List

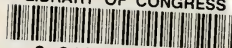
YOUNG DOCTOR DEVINE. A Farce in Two Acts, by MRS. E. J. H. GOODFELLOW. One of the most popular plays for girls. For nine female characters. Time in playing, thirty minutes. Scenery, ordinary interior. Modern costumes. Girls in a boarding-school, learning that a young doctor is coming to vaccinate all the pupils, eagerly consult each other as to the manner of fascinating the physician. When the doctor appears upon the scene the pupils discover that the physician is a female practitioner.

SISTER MASONS. A Burlesque in One Act, by FRANK DUMONT. For eleven females. Time, thirty minutes. Costumes, fantastic gowns, or dominoes. Scene, interior. A grand expose of Masonry. Some women profess to learn the secrets of a Masonic lodge by hearing their husbands talk in their sleep, and they institute a similar organization.

A COMMANDING POSITION. A Farcical Entertainment, by AMELIA SANFORD. For seven female characters and ten or more other ladies and children. Time, one hour. Costumes, modern. Scenes, easy interiors and one street scene. Marian Young gets tired living with her aunt, Miss Skinflint. She decides to "attain a commanding position." Marian tries hospital nursing, college settlement work and school teaching, but decides to go back to housework.

HOW A WOMAN KEEPS A SECRET. A Comedy in One Act, by FRANK DUMONT. For ten female characters. Time, half an hour. Scene, an easy interior. Costumes, modern. Mabel Sweetly has just become engaged to Harold, but it's "the deepest kind of a secret." Before announcing it they must win the approval of Harold's uncle, now in Europe, or lose a possible ten thousand a year. At a tea Mabel meets her dearest friend. Maude sees Mabel has a secret, she coaxes and Mabel tells her. But Maude lets out the secret in a few minutes to another friend and so the secret travels.

THE OXFORD AFFAIR. A Comedy in Three Acts, by JOSEPHINE H. COBB and JENNIE E. PAINE. For eight female characters. Plays one hour and three-quarters. Scenes, interiors at a seaside hotel. Costumes, modern. The action of the play is located at a summer resort. Alice Graham, in order to chaperon herself, poses as a widow, and Miss Oxford first claims her as a sister-in-law, then denounces her. The onerous duties of Miss Oxford, who attempts to serve as chaperon to Miss Howe and Miss Ashton in the face of many obstacles, furnish an evening of rare enjoyment.



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A SURPRISE PARTY AT BRINKLEY'S. An Entertainment in One Scene, by WARD MACAULEY. Seven male and seven female characters. Interior scene, or may be given without scenery. Costumes, modern. Time, one hour. By the author of the popular successes, "Graduation Day at Wood Hill School," "Back to the Country Store," etc. The villagers have planned a birthday surprise party for Mary Brinkley, recently graduated from college. They all join in jolly games, songs, conundrums, etc., and Mary becomes engaged, which surprises the surprisers. The entertainment is a sure success.

JONES VS. JINKS. A Mock Trial in One Act, by EDWARD MUMFORD. Fifteen male and six female characters, with supernumeraries if desired. May be played all male. Many of the parts (members of the jury, etc.) are small. Scene, a simple interior; may be played without scenery. Costumes, modern. Time of playing, one hour. This mock trial has many novel features, unusual characters and quick action. Nearly every character has a funny entrance and laughable lines. There are many rich parts, and fast fun throughout.

THE SIGHT-SEEING CAR. A Comedy Sketch in One Act, by ERNEST M. GOULD. For seven males, two females, or may be all male. Parts may be doubled, with quick changes, so that four persons may play the sketch. Time, forty-five minutes. Simple street scene. Costumes, modern. The superintendent of a sight-seeing automobile engages two men to run the machine. A Jew, a farmer, a fat lady and other humorous characters give them all kinds of trouble. This is a regular gatling-gun stream of rollicking repartee.

THE CASE OF SMYTHE VS. SMITH. An Original Mock Trial in One Act, by FRANK DUMONT. Eighteen males and two females, or may be all male. Plays about one hour. Scene, a county courtroom; requires no scenery; may be played in an ordinary hall. Costumes, modern. This entertainment is nearly perfect of its kind, and a sure success. It can be easily produced in any place or on any occasion, and provides almost any number of good parts.

THE OLD MAIDS' ASSOCIATION. A Farcical Entertainment in One Act, by LOUISE LATHAM WILSON. For thirteen females and one male. The male part may be played by a female, and the number of characters increased to twenty or more. Time, forty minutes. The play requires neither scenery nor properties, and very little in the way of costumes. Can easily be prepared in one or two rehearsals.

BARGAIN DAY AT BLOOMSTEIN'S. A Farcical Entertainment in One Act, by EDWARD MUMFORD. For five males and ten females, with supers. Interior scene. Costumes, modern. Time, thirty minutes. The characters and the situations which arise from their endeavors to buy and sell make rapid-fire fun from start to finish.